

**Mayor Bodker Remarks
National Purple Heart Day Ceremony
7 August, 2015**

**WELCOME ALL VETERANS, THE COMMANDERS OF LOCAL VETERANS
ASSOCIATIONS, MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE
HEART AND HONORED GUESTS:**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I am both honored and humbled to be a part of today's ceremony and we could not have selected a more fitting venue for the Purple Heart monument. The Johns Creek Veterans memorial is a solemn reminder of service and sacrifice. It serves our community well as a gathering place to reflect and give thanks to those who have made our nation strong.

As Americans, we enjoy freedoms and privileges not found anywhere else in the world. We enjoy the opportunity to pursue our dreams, move freely throughout the country, vote, voice our displeasure over government decisions and policies, and worship in the way we choose.

These freedoms are oftentimes taken for granted at home, while around the world, our servicemembers remain forward where they are sent into harms way to protect us from those who are actively trying to threaten our way of life.

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Internationally, our country frequently faces criticism and ridicule. However, the U.S. is still a beacon of hope for millions around the world. People keep coming. They spend their life savings to come, and they risk their lives to reach our borders in pursuit of a better life, and the myriad of available opportunities our nation has to offer.

How is it possible that after nearly 240 years our nation remains free, remains strong, and is still viewed by millions around the world as a nation of hope and opportunity?

The answer is sitting here among us today. It is the reason we have gathered today. The reason is that our country is blessed to have brave men and women who voluntarily stand up, raise their hand, and take an oath to support and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies.

This oath comes with a price and our servicemembers understand the stakes. They understand that it is more than about sacrificing time away from family and friends that they will never get back. Birthdays, and anniversaries, and other major family milestones missed. Not being able to be there when a child feels afraid and needs to feel the hug of a parent or hear the words "I love you" when they need it the most. Not being able to be there when the house is falling apart, the car needs repairs, or the family is in crisis.

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These unwritten stakes are much higher and the cost is sometimes greater than most of us will ever know. However, our servicemembers fully understand that they put their lives at risk in defense of our nation with each deployment. This risk turns real when they are badly injured or worse, when lives are lost.

The Purple Heart medal is the Department of Defense's formal recognition of those veterans who are killed and wounded in combat. It is one of the very few medals awarded in the name of the president. It represents the reality of the risk our servicemembers face.

Our servicemembers have been in direct contact with violent extremists and other adversaries for nearly 14 consecutive years. A period of armed conflict longer than any other in our nation's history. Over this timeframe, we have frequently seen statistics of those who have been killed or wounded in areas of conflict.

It is important that each time we see one of these statistics in the media or online that we do not allow ourselves to focus only on the number. I ask you to pause each time and take a moment to consciously realize that there is a name and face associated with each number. It is a person whose life has been forever impacted by a specific violent event in the service of our nation.

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If we were to draw concentric circles around that person we might find a child, a spouse, a parent, a sibling, other immediate family members, relatives, and friends, that most likely number in the hundreds, who are also touched by this event.

Think about the magnitude of impact. Just one person who volunteered to put their life at risk for the greater good of our nation.

Just one person who made a conscious decision to sacrifice time away from immediate family and friends, and risk their own well-being and life to protect our way of life.

Just one person who impacts the lives of millions in one nation. Simply astounding.

These selfless individuals come from all walks of life and backgrounds from around our nation and, more specifically, from the metro-Atlanta area. They were either born and raised here or relocated.

Many of these individuals are here today. While they do not seek our thanks and recognition, we owe this to them. They were awarded the Purple Heart medal for their sacrifice and with this comes our eternal gratitude.

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As you thank them for their service and listen to the names of other Purple Heart recipients that are read today, I ask you to include them in your thoughts and prayers and never forget their legacy and what it means to our country.

From our nation's independence to both World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and the many other wars and conflicts in between, our freedom and way of life remains intact. And it did not come without a price. Those who wear the Purple Heart paid a significant price for us all.

On behalf of the City of Johns Creek, I thank you for your service. May God bless you and may God bless the United States of America.